



Jocelyn

After Nina and I had shared that... experience with the handsome man from the motel bar, it was like we were back to normal.

We were totally in sync.

We spent the whole next day cozied up in bed, eating a buffet of different flavored Cheetos and spilling our guts about everything.



And the more we talked to each other, the more I was overwhelmed with the sense that... I'd known Nina for a long time.

Forever, maybe.

It was like I knew the words she was about to say before she said them. Every story she told me, every anecdote about her past or the people she's known, felt like something I'd experienced myself.

I've never felt that before, that type of connection, with another person.

As a healer, I was used to feeling more connected to people than everybody else was. I was used to being able to understand and empathize to a much higher degree.



But this... this was completely different.

It was like Nina was opening up the book of herself, allowing me to see the writing on the pages. But I'd already read the story.

I'd already had it memorized.

So after we spent another night together—this time no third party, just the two of us, making passionate, tender, long-lasting love—we decided it was time to go. As I got dressed, watching Nina comb her hair in the bathroom, I wondered if leaving this motel would cause the bubble to pop.



The bubble of loved-up perfection.

The bubble of openness, where nothing was too scary or too private to talk about.

Stop worrying, Jocelyn, I ordered myself. You have your sexuality back, you have Nina back, you feel restored. Nothing's gone wrong so far.

“You ready?” Nina asked, popping her head into the room.

I nodded, buttoning the last button on my shirt. “Let's do it,” I said, shooting her a smile.



We'd been walking for a couple hours now, the sunlight beaming off our faces as we pushed on ahead in a comfortable silence.

I knew we'd be hitting the start of pack territory any minute now. I felt the pit of worry in my stomach start to expand.

I was having an internal argument with myself. The past two days with Nina had been nothing short of perfect. The connection we had... it was indescribable.

I felt so much for her.



I felt so much when I was *with* her.

I owed it to her to try and keep her safe. To protect her.

But at the same time, if I did what I had to in order to protect her, I was ensuring that we'd never be together. That we'd never spend any more hours curled up between the sheets, eating junk food and laughing so hard our stomachs hurt.

We'd never get the chance to really try.

This was the argument that took up my entire brain space, and it was still going strong when we reached the sign that told us East Coast Pack territory was beginning.



“Nina,” I said, stopping before the sign. “I can’t... I can’t let you go any farther.”

“We talked about this, Jocelyn. I told you—”

“I know we talked about it. I know what you said. But I can’t... I won’t be able to forgive myself if anything happens to you...”

Nina took a step closer to me, her eyes showing the defiance that was coursing through her veins. “This is my choice.”

I looked at the ground. I knew what I was doing, arguing with her about this. I was making it seem like I didn’t want her to come with me. I was pushing her away.



“I don’t know what Aiden will do to you. It’s not just some exaggeration, Nina. You lied to him, you betrayed him, you put the pack in danger. And Aiden’s a good Alpha. He’ll do anything to protect his pack. He’ll make an example out of you—”

“I don’t care.”

I looked back up at her. I hoped she could see the genuine care in my eyes, the way I could see the defiance in hers.

“Well, I do care. I care about *you*, Nina. And I’m the one responsible for bringing you here, which means I’m the one responsible if anything happens



to you. I can't be the one that caused you pain. I could never do that to you."

She kept staring into my eyes for a few seconds after I'd finished speaking. Then she stepped closer to me, grabbing my hands in hers. The touch caused a wave of warmth to wash over me. Even just holding her hands made me feel stronger.

"I know you're just looking out for me, Jocelyn. You're the kindest, sweetest, *sexiest* person I've ever met. And I know walking forward might be dangerous. But you know what's worse than Aiden hurting me? You know what's worse than any Alpha torturing me, or killing me? Walking away from you. *Knowing* that I walked away from you."



Sienna

The brunch was almost done, but I couldn't stand being in the back room any longer. There was too much happiness there. Too much *giddiness*. And I was feeling anything but giddy right about now.

So I told Selene I was heading to the bathroom and came to the restaurant's main bar. I took a seat on a stool and watched as the people around me drank brunch cocktails, none of them having a care in the world.

They weren't worried about creepy healers or in-laws or the unknown genetic composition of their unborn child. No, they were only worried



about getting another Bloody Mary as fast as they could.

“This doesn’t look like the bathroom.” I heard Aiden’s voice from behind me. Usually, his voice was enough to put a smile on my face, but I was in an extra sour mood today.

Between the experience with the healer yesterday, the uncertainty around what had happened that caused the pain, and the joint baby shower that my co-hostess didn’t even bother showing up for, I was in a dark hole I didn’t see myself coming out of anytime soon.

“I just needed a second to breathe,” I said, turning my head to look at him.

“Just a little bit longer,” he assured me, bringing his hands to my shoulders. He started to massage them, but the contact made me recoil. I slid myself away from his grasp.

“Please, Aiden. Can I just... have a minute?”

He looked at me like I’d slapped him.

“Please?”

“Uh, yeah,” he said, the hurt in his eyes staring back at me. “Sure,” he murmured, walking away.



Josh

“The name is Gregory Grantwell. He was admitted here four and a half weeks ago.”

“Like I told you, man, it doesn’t matter who he is. If you’re not family of someone inside or a doctor, I can’t let you in.”

I glared at the front desk guy. He had greasy brown hair and acne, and it was clear that sitting behind the desk at some mental asylum gave him a power trip.

“You don’t understand,” I said, seething at him. “This is life or death. We *need* to speak to him.”



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“That sucks, man. I’m sorry. There’s nothing I can do.”

“There *is* something you can do!” Michelle cut in from beside me, her bitch face on and ready. “Let us the fuck in!”

He looked at her, his face showing no sign of fear. “Look, am I gonna need to call security?”

“Do you know who I am?” I demanded.

“Someone important, I’m betting.”



“I’m the East Coast Pack Beta, all right? This is pack business. We need to speak to Gregory Grantwell *now*. I need to find out who he is, what he knows—”

“Grantwell’s a creep,” the front desk guy muttered under his breath. He was no longer looking at us. His eyes had flitted back to the computer screen in front of him.

Michelle and I exchanged a look.

“What did you say?”

“Huh? Oh. He’s a creep.”

“Why?”



The front desk guy shrugged. “He worked at some orphanage before he got here. Spent all that time around kids, around babies. Word was he got too attached to `em. Like, way too attached. Something’s off about the dude.”

I leaned forward on the desk, staring right at him. “What do you mean, off?”

“He’s definitely crazy, okay? I wouldn’t have let any kid near him, that’s for damn sure. That’s why no visitors. He’s uncontrollable. Dangerous. You should be thanking me. It’s for your own safety.”

My patience was wearing very goddamn thin. I looked beside me to share a glance with Michelle, to non-verbally communicate our next move, but the space beside me was empty.

What the hell?

She was just here.

Panic washed over me.

I backed away from the front desk, looking around the lobby. And then I saw her retreating figure, turning the corner down the hall.

Michelle



The second the guy behind the front desk mentioned that Gregory Grantwell had worked in an orphanage, I felt it. It didn't hurt—not really.

It felt like the seconds right after you apply numbing cream when your skin itches and tingles and just feels... weird.

I immediately glanced at it, at the burn on my wrist, and saw the glow.

But it wasn't the same glow as before. The whole burn wasn't glowing this time.



No, this time the glow was forming a symbol.

An arrow.

And it was pointing down the hallway.

So I left Josh and the guy to argue with each other, and I took off in the direction the glowing arrow was pointing. When I got to the end of the hallway, I turned the corner.

I couldn't explain it, but I was like in an alternate reality. I could still think, I could still move, but it was like I could only think about following the arrow.

I could only move if it was in the right direction. It was like the mission was controlling me.



I turned down different hallways and walked through different doors until I found myself in a communal area. There were tables and chairs, a few couches, some magazines strewn about.

But the arrow, it pushed me forward. To a man sitting alone at a table. He had dark scruff all over his cheeks, and his fingers drummed on the table. His shoulders were hunched over and his eyes cast down.

As I took the seat opposite him, my eyes caught on his neck.



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He had the bite.

Just like the newspaper article had said.



As my eyes drifted farther up, to his face, I felt a buzz of connection explode inside me. Because his eyes were no longer focused on the table.

No. Now, they were focused on me.

Next Chapter

